

Minutes of a Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee - Childrens and Families held in the Luttrell Room - County Hall, Taunton TA1 4DY, on Wednesday, 12 July 2023 at 10.00 am

Present:

Cllr Leigh Redman (Chair)

Cllr Peter Clayton

Cllr John Hunt

Cllr Martin Lovell

Cllr Rosemary Woods (substitute for Cllr Suria Aujla)

Eileen Tipper - co-opted member

Cllr Andy Hadley

Cllr Henry Hobhouse (substitute for Cllr Evie Potts-Jones)

Cllr Frances Nicholson

Cllr Jason Baker – attended remotely

Ruth Hobbs – co-opted member

In attendance:

Cllr Tessa Munt

Other Members present remotely:

Cllr Alan Bradford

Cllr Nick Cottle

Cllr Sue Osborne

Cllr Claire Sully

Cllr Norman Cavill

Cllr Liz Leyshon

Cllr Gill Slocombe

1 Apologies for Absence - Agenda Item 1

Apologies were received from Cllr Evie Potts-Jones (substituted by Cllr Henry Hobhouse), Cllr Suria Aujla (substituted by Cllr Rosemary Woods), Cllr Simon Carswell (no substitute), Cllr Jeny Snell (no substitute) and Cllr Jenny Kenton (no substitute).

2 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 2

There were no further declarations of interest made at the meeting.

3 Minutes from the Previous Meeting held on 4 May 2023 - Agenda Item 3

Resolved: -

That the minutes of the Scrutiny Committee - Childrens and Families held on 4 May 2023 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

4 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 4

Submissions / request to speak had been received from the following members of the public and the information provided had been circulated as a supplementary agenda pack.

1. Ms E Elliott – the questions were read out at the meeting by S Mathivet.
2. Ms H Washbourne – attended the meeting and read out her questions.
3. Mrs V Pearson – attended the meeting and read out her questions.

On behalf of the Committee the Chair thanked them for their questions and for taking the time to attend the meeting.

It was agreed that the responses will be circulated in an addendum document with the minutes from the meeting.

5 Scrutiny Committee - Children and Families Work Programme - Agenda Item 5

The Committee received and noted the current work programme and outcome tracker and the Executive's Forward Plan.

The Chair highlighted the following: -

- In view of the work plan, the need for some additional meetings to be scheduled and it is proposed that an additional meeting is arranged in October – details to be circulated.
- Members of the Committee will be invited to attend the Scrutiny Committee – Communities meeting on 9 August for the following agenda item –
Recommissioning of the 16+ housing / supported accommodation.

6 22/23 Budget outturn position and 23/24 Emerging issues - Agenda Item 6

The Chair welcomed the Council's Strategic Manager, Finance, Sian Kenny and the Service Director, Children and Families, Jayne Shelbourne-Barrow to the meeting.

Ms Kenny provided an overview of the budget outturn position for 2022/23 and issues around the 2023/24 budget.

Ms Kenny highlighted the following matters: -

- Financial overview position - 2022/23 outturn approx. £20m overspent; 2023/24 budget monitoring emerging issues £40m overspend; 2024/25 MTFP forecast Feb '23 £40m but with inflation likely to be higher.
- High level information on the 2022/23 Outturn General Fund Children's Services £21.4m overspend.
- The emerging issues / risks / mitigations relating to the General Fund for 23/24.
- Information on the 22/23 outturn of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).
- 2022/23 outturn and LA maintained school balances.
- The 23/24 emerging issues / risks / mitigations relating to the DSG and schools.

The Committee asked a number of questions and made a number of comments which were responded to at the meeting:

- What influence does the local authority have in respect of the overspends highlighted – *the MTFP considered by Executive for 24/25 already included information on High Needs and the impact on the local authority.*
- 22/23 outturn / overspend and position with regard to the current financial year – *advised that the service is working on the Qtr. 1 budget monitoring report (position at end June) which will be considered at the September Executive meeting.*
- The Chair asked that members have this information at the earliest opportunity – *also confirmed the LA does closely monitor current budget positions / financial forecasts.*
- Position regarding the DSG and the 'override' mentioned in the presentation – *the current cumulative High Needs deficit is £20m – estimated to rise to c£70m by March 2026, without mitigation being in place (analysis of Somerset position from national Newton Europe Delivering Better Value programme, at which point it will become a general fund liability; the DfE is holding the deficits nationally (and it is a national not just a Somerset issue); would become an issue for the local authority in 25/26 if the override is not extended.*
- School deficits – *9 schools (out of 133 local authority maintained schools) shared a cumulative deficit position of £1.9m, which represents an in-year deficit of £1.2m to carry forward into 23/24 and Wadham Secondary school position is of considerable concern as it had an accumulated deficit of £1.5 at 31 March 2023 without an agreed recovery plan; outlined work being done with the school and the underlying problems have been addressed by an area restructure; role of new education sub group highlighted and plans being worked on – will come back to the committee on that when agreed; this situation clearly needs to be resolved.*

- Overspend in home to school transport and SEND school transport – *significant review undertaken by Edge Public Solutions who have identified a range of actions which are being taken forward in relation to both areas.*
- Sufficiency of special school places - *the DfE is building special free school in Ash with 120 places and this will be open for September 2024 (2-year delay); the DfE is also planning to build a school with 64 places in Wells (opening timeline 2027 - 2029). There is a financial impact of not having those schools in place as those already identified as currently needing special school places are being placed, as an alternative, in independent non-maintained school setting . The increased costs of these provisions compared to a special free school is a budget impact of - £1.3m per term (and therefore approximately £4m each academic year).*
- *There will be budget sessions for all members from September and there will be a session on the DSG which will be useful to attend.*
- Having stable workforce is good news but a more stable workforce impacts on staff turnover savings (23/24 General Fund emerging issues) - *having stable workforce is good news but level of underspend seen in previous years is therefore not likely to occur in 23/24.*

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair thanked Ms Kenny for the update. The Committee will continue monitor the Childrens Services budget position and will also be included on the agenda for the next meeting.

7 Academisation Finance Policy and Procedure - Agenda Item 7

The Chair welcomed the Council's Service Director Education Partnership & Skills, Amelia Walker to the meeting. Ms Walker gave a presentation outlining the proposed changes to academisation finance policy and procedure ahead of consideration by the Executive at its meeting on 2 August 2023. The Committee was invited to comment on the draft report and the proposal.

Ms Walker outlined why the changes are being proposed, which is around openness and transparency; the need for coordination; financial pressures. The Council supports the principle that schools should be able to choose their future, this is better achieved within a planned and transparent framework for decision making and implementation that allows all stakeholders, particularly schools, multi-academy trusts and the local authority to deliver change in a manner which mitigates the inevitable risks associated with change. These proposals are designed to mitigate risks and provide clarity and stability in relation to financial measures associated with a change of status from local authority maintained to academy status.

The Committee had no negative comments on the report and suggested that the information in Table set out in Appendix 1 (schools by phase and status) needed to be updated.

8 Update on Homes & Horizons Partnership - Agenda Item 8

The Chair welcomed the Council's Strategic Manager – Strategic Partner Development, Daniel Moncrieff to the meeting. Mr Moncrieff gave a presentation providing a detailed progress update on the homes and horizons strategic partnership. This is the Strategic Partnership between SomersetFT, the Council and The Shaw Trust, supporting children with complex needs including homes, high needs fostering and therapeutic education.

Mr Moncrieff highlighted the following:

- The progress on purchasing 6 homes and 1 further home in progress and are searching for 8th home.
- 4 young people in the first 4 homes and next 2 children move shortly – the next home is due to open in about months' time.
- Registered Manager recruitment and support workers trained – 67 staff recruited and 55 staff trained through joint model.
- Therapeutic education staff in place and all young people engaged with some education activity.
- Hearing the voice of young people.
- Therapeutic education provision – best mechanism to provide this with an Academy school and going through the free school presumptive process - Misterton site is 1st of the 2 planned locations – mentioned the registration discussions with DfE Regional Director – awaiting DfE sign-off and cannot start building works until receive that – interim education package therefore until up and running.
- High Needs Fostering – led to increase in fostering and high need fostering with 8 potential foster carers identified.
- Finances and fiscal savings.
- Some risks and issues / management and mitigations, including the education provision not able to open (also impacts on fostering) – continuing to negotiate with the Regional Director, whilst developing interim provision.

The Committee asked a number of questions and made a number of comments which were responded to at the meeting:

- Had undertaken very careful work when selecting Shaw Trust and wonder if there is anything can do to help in the discussions with the DfE – *doing what can and hope can be resolved before need to consider next steps.*
- Support the need to apply pressure appropriately to allow good work to continue.

- Do like that young people's voices are included and would also like to hear about *outcomes* for young people (i.e. the impact this work is having on their lives) - *all the young people who moved into the homes had experienced numerous placement breakdowns and confirmed are tracking that with data (noting the role of the Corporate Parent Board in receiving that sort of detail).*
- Engagement with the community when open homes – *confirmed is ongoing – meet with local members initially, then parish councils and have community engagement event for the people in the immediate vicinity of the home, so they can meet the Manager and staff of the home and see what the homes is like before a young person moves in. The vast majority of the people we meet through those events at all the homes have been really positive and constructive. The process go through in terms of community engagement allows people to have regular correspondence with the managers and the Executive member has been to the community engagement events as well.*
- Importance of taking the community 'with us' in this recognised.

The Committee congratulated Mr Moncrieff and the whole team on the recent national award for the Children's home partnership. In conclusion, the Chair thanked Mr Moncrieff for the detailed update and to continue building on the success of the homes and horizons partnership.

9 Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing in Somerset - Agenda Item 9

The Chair welcomed the following to the meeting for this agenda item:-

- Dr Tim Cockerill – Somerset Council, Principal Educational Psychologist
- Patsy Temple – Strategic Manager, Public Health
- Mark Conway – Deputy Head CAMHS
- Patrick Worthington – NHS Somerset, CYP Mental Health Commissioner
- Nik Harwood – CEO Young Somerset
- Lisa Walker – Somerset Council, Strategic Manager, Ops Perm and Wellbeing

The Committee received a detailed presentation on children's mental health and wellbeing in Somerset, covering the following:

- The national and local picture, which reflects the national context, increased pressures and need across various teams and service areas, including increasingly complex and crisis presentations.
- Prevention and early support - achievements and key areas of focus / priorities.
- An update on the Trauma Informed Somerset practice model and implementation and the system wide trauma informed training offer.
- Support for those with mild-moderate mental health needs –Mental Health Support Teams work with children and young people aged 5-18 to provide low intensity cognitive behavioural therapy interventions for mild to moderate mental

health and behavioural difficulties in school and community settings across Somerset. Young Somerset is a third sector organisation and can apply for external funding and so bring more funding into the county.

- CAMHS data, which shows sharp rise in urgent care needs, presenting to the liaison teams at Musgrove and Yeovil Hospitals.
- Next steps – collaboration, trauma informed care, ‘reversing the pyramid.’
- The specialist support for Children Looked After, Care leavers and Kinship families.
- The strategic commissioning priorities, as there is a lot of unmet need and are in process of recruiting a dedicated project lead to inform service response.
- Need to embed the principles of the approach – children and young people get help they need: right place, right time, right person – further establish the community / education based mental health offer.
- Mentioned regional summit taking place in early October which members are very welcome to join if they wish.

The Committee asked a number of questions and made a number of comments which were responded to at the meeting:

- Position on the recruitment of trauma informed coordinator and the training offer – *approval to recruit to this post was given recently and the postholder will start driving change forward; there is a clear plan in place for September as agreed level 2 offer for all schools, so this is further ahead than the coordinator role; trauma informed principles and approach within the whole school approach for emotional wellbeing through the Somerset Wellbeing Framework.*
- Clarification on the data detailed on slide 5, support for those with mild-moderate mental health needs – *an explanation on what the data is saying was given. Schools engagement mentioned as well. Will share the most recent quarterly report which provides more detail on this (for example ‘completion rate’).*
- Questions on the network of trauma informed champions and how this will operate – *will be sector champions so not necessarily in schools; going to develop pathfinder schools which will become hubs of best practice, so a peer support model.*
- Questions on staffing, recruitment, and retention of mental health staff / Young Somerset – *Talking Therapies mentioned – Health England fund trainees who are then employed during their training year and receive a postgraduate diploma qualification from Exeter University. There are 6 funded places for January and able to select and recruit very well. They get a 2-year training contract – are then able to become a senior practitioner or clinical supervisor which helps with retention too, so working on pathways (creatively) as a system across Somerset.*
- Question on whether young people self-present with eating disorders – *rarely self-present but other conditions do self-refer – have good and established liaison with acute sites as a system in Somerset. Joined up with Young Somerset*

to develop 'Jigsaw' which is a service which Young Somerset operate alongside liaison to try to reduce the number of re presentations and this is having a good impact.

- Reference to teachers' professional skills issue / nuanced – *culture of school / system matters. One of the aims of the Education for Life Strategy is on getting right culture across 'everywhere that children are.'*
- Question on the self-injury information – *the Summit mentioned earlier will explore this – members are welcome to participate in the steering group if have time.*

In conclusion, the Chair thanked the presenters for the positive and extremely detailed presentation and asked for an update to the Committee in 6 months' time.

10 Somerset Youth Justice Partnership Board Plan 2023 - 2024 - Agenda Item 10

The Chair welcomed the Council's Operations Manager, Somerset Youth Justice Team / Prevention Services, Ms Helen MacDonald to the meeting. The Committee received a report and presentation on the Somerset Youth Justice Partnership Board Plan 2023 – 2024.

The Somerset Youth Justice Partnerships Board's annual 'Youth Justice Plan' was submitted to the National YJB on 30 June and will be signed off by Full Council (retrospectively) in September 2023 (in accordance with Regulation 4 of the Local Authorities (England) Functions and Responsibilities Regulations 2000).

Ms MacDonald highlighted the following:

- Purpose of the Somerset Youth Justice Plan 2023/24
- Headline achievements in 2022/23 – highlights further opportunities, risks, and challenges to provide a focus for the priorities for 2023/25 and sits alongside the Boards strategic priorities 2023 – 2025.
- The strategic priorities
- Reoffending – in Somerset is 43.6% (this relates to an increase in a very small cohort) - June 2020 – June 2021 – of some concern as it is higher than the southwest, England & Wales and the Avon & Somerset PCC for the same period.
- Majority of work is around prevention and diversion – to avoid escalation; education and impact on 'not in education, employment or training' (NEET); Serious youth violence; Custody.
- Challenges and risks – due Inspection very soon; demand; small but increasing number of children assessed as high or very high risk due to county lines, exploitation, serious youth violence; rurality (lack of access to public transport); changes in workforce.

The Committee asked a number of questions and made a number of comments which were responded to at the meeting:

- Felt that the format of the Plan was somewhat confusing – *the Plan is determined by the Youth Justice Board and this comment will be reported back.*
- Question on knife crime data; tactical and operational responses – *multi agency approach and steps taken are based on national learning and committed to having evidence-based approach moving forward.*
- Prevention work in schools and turnaround project in secondary schools – has positive feedback and valued by schools – is there a plan to do work with younger aged children – *nothing immediate – there is the Teachable Moments initiative, voluntary participation, good youth work practice in school settings and like to see that continue. The Turnaround project is for age 10 upwards.*
- The team is small but very effective and child centred which is more powerful strategically – would welcome seeing an evaluation or audit of the Teachable Moments initiative.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair thanked Ms MacDonald for attending the meeting and for presenting the Plan.

The Committee:

1. Noted the contents of the Youth Justice Plan submission, including review of previous year's performance and plans for the forthcoming year.
2. Noted and accepted the annual Youth Justice Plan and Somerset Youth Justice Board 2-year strategic plan for 2023 – 2025.

11 Home to School Transport Task and Finish Group - interim update - Agenda Item 11

The Committee received an update from the Executive member, Cllr Tessa Munt.

The Transport Review has been completed by Edge Public Solutions, with a report provided to officers in May. Richard Hall has met again with the Task and Finish Group to discuss the report findings and recommendations. David Carter (Service Director Infrastructure and Transport) and the Service Director Inclusion are scheduled to discuss the review recommendations at the Council's Transition, Transformation and Change Board on 18 July, with a view to seeking approval to establishing a transformation programme to address the review recommendations over a two-to-three-year period.

The Committee:

1. Noted the update.

2. That due to the imperative for change (delivering required savings and protection of the service from risk of failure), asked for the report to be shared with members at the earliest opportunity and for the Executive member to report back to the next meeting.

12 Items for Information - Standing Item - Agenda Item 12

The Committee noted the following items for information:

- (a) Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) publication – Scrutiny of Children’s Services – a short guide – circulated on 9 May 2023
- (b) Homes and Horizons Partnership – circulated on 15 May 2023
- (c) Progress update on Ofsted Action Plan – circulated on 10 July 2023
- (d) Children’s Services – current structure chart – circulated on 28 June 2023

(The meeting ended at 1.16 pm)

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CHAIR